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ABSTRACT

Teachers who have classes with many Southeast Asian American students face the dual challenge of their own lack of knowledge about the cultural backgrounds of their students and of the students' often fragmentary understandings of their own war-torn cultures. This overview briefly describes the history and culture of Indochina to provide knowledge for the teacher and to encourage the teacher to stimulate the child's interest in his or her own culture. Central to understanding the complex populations of Indochina is recognizing the differences between highland and lowland peoples (the Hmong and Mien, for example, as opposed to the lowland Lao, Cambodians, and Vietnamese). A knowledge of the interactions between the peoples of Southeast Asia and the Europeans (particularly the French, the Chinese, and the Italians) is also necessary to an understanding of the present immigrant cultures. (SLD)

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF INDOCHINA

WILLIAM COLLINS, PH.D.

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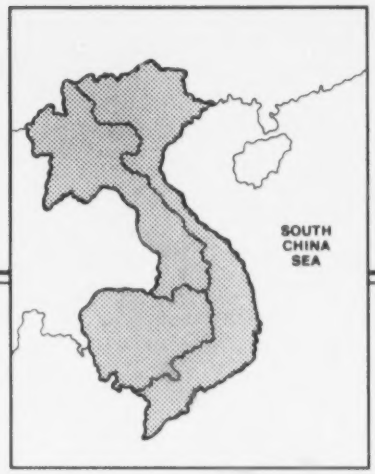
An Overview of the History And Culture of Indochina



By William Collins, Ph.D.

The teacher who has a class with many Southeast Asian pupils faces a dual challenge. First, the histories and cultures of the lands from which these refugee children come may be unfamiliar to the American teacher. One aim of this overview is to sketch briefly the prominent landmarks of the terrain of mainland Southeast Asia and to introduce some of the values and attitudes young people from his region are likely to have.

The second challenge the teacher faces is that many Southeast Asian refugee children have had such a dislocated experience of war and flight and hardship that they lack the intimate knowledge of their own national heritage they would possess if they had grown up in their own country. These children have a fragmentary sense of their lands of origin, which often translates as uneasiness about their own identity. Accordingly, the second aim of this overview is to encourage the teacher to stimulate the interest of these refugee children to study their own cultural birthright.

The first question we should ask is what is the correct name for these refugee peoples and what distinctions will further our efforts to understand them.

Indochina

The term "Indochina" is frequently used to refer in a general way to the national origins of today's Southeast Asian refugees. The term rightly calls our attention to a significant feature of the history of mainland Southeast Asia. This is indeed the region where the great civilizations of India and China have long met one another indirectly through the peoples of Cambodia and Vietnam.

The defects of the term, however, probably outweigh its virtues. Because the French used the term "Indochina" to describe the union of their Southeast Asian possessions, use of the term today tends to shift our view from the indigenous cultures and nations to a political and economic entity created by the French colonial regime as France vied with other European nations in the region in carving out the spheres of domination:

the British in India, Burma and Malaya; the Dutch in the East Indies; and the Spanish in the Philippines. These former colonial entities have been adopted as more or less natural political units in the post-colonial era by ambitious nationalists in the new states of India, Burma, Malaysia, where they became enormously valued prestige items.
We can glimpse some of the religious concerns of people in prehistoric Southeast Asia in their well-developed megalithic cult. Archaeologists have discovered fields of huge urns carved out of stone boulders. These urns evidently were used as receptacles for the remains of the dead and were probably clan sepulchers. Groups of large upright stone memorials have been found as well as great stone disks that mark the burial place of human remains in ceramic jars. This concern for the proper treatment of the dead continues into the earliest historical period when we find throughout the region the practice of collecting the bones of the deceased and undertaking a secondary burial ritual. In these rituals the remains of a venerated ancestor might be placed in a special shrine or in a ceramic jar and set on a hilltop or in a cave or on a boat on a sandy beach. The practices of present-day tribal peoples of the area suggest that ancient graves were also traditionally decorated with effigies sculpted from wood. Such material perishes very quickly in the tropics, however, and leaves no trace for the archaeologist.

The characteristic religious concerns of present-day Southeast Asians, worship of ancestor spirits and the spirits of cultivated crops, clearly reach far back to their Dong Son and Hoabinhian heritage. These beliefs continue to find expression alongside the more systematic ethical and cosmological schemes contributed by Chinese and Indian cultures in more recent times. Southeast Asians generally believe that well-disposed souls of the dead can be called upon to promote the prosperity of their descendants. The fundamental value of respect for the elders that characterizes the contemporary cultures of all Southeast Asia is connected to a religion oriented toward the ancestors. The elders can assist the youngsters if approached properly. The elders are in a position to act as intermediaries between the living with their needs, fears and difficulties and the demands of the ever-present spirits, who can be reached by trance and sacrifice.

Similar respect for the power of the spirits of nature is prevalent in Southeast Asia among hill farmers and lowland agriculturalists, jungle dwellers and townspeople. The spirits of the land on which one builds a home or clears for planting, the spirits of the water and other elements have to be propitiated to assure the spiritual wellbeing of householders and crops. These spirits also must be placated to avert disease and famine. All these Southeast Asian societies have important ritual experts whose task it is to make contact with the spirits to promote the health and prosperity of the community.

These observations hold for the vast majority of Southeast Asian villagers. Of course, it is also true that many members of the elite and urbanized classes of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos have tended to reject traditional mystical beliefs as they have adopted rational conventions and values from China, India and Europe.

HIGHLANDS AND LOWLANDS

There is a basic distinction that has been useful to many students of Southeast Asia and that is also recognized as fundamental by the Southeast Asians themselves. The distinction contrasts people of the hills and people of the plains. On the one hand, there are tribal, animist (spirit worshipping) peoples who move through the forest-covered mountains; and on the other hand, there are farmers in permanent villages in the lowland river valleys who live in states and practice some form of Buddhism, one of the major world religions.

The way Southeast Asians make this distinction can be expressed by a question like "to what group do you belong?" The difference is that for the hill tribes, the question means "what is your ethnic group?" and signifies a concern about whether "we" are potentially intermarrying groups or not. For the lowlanders, the question means "to what state or sovereign do you belong?" which translates as a concern about the authority to whom taxes or tributes are paid and whether my property is safe from you and your leaders.

For Southeast Asian highlanders, the most significant categories of personal identity are based on genealogy and marriage, while for lowlanders the basic social categories are rooted in power and politics. The Hmong and the Mien are examples of Southeast Asian hill tribes. The Lao, Cambodians and Vietnamese represent people of the plains and valleys of Southeast Asia.

FARMERS OF THE FORESTS

The Most striking difference between highlands and lowlands in Southeast Asia is of course related to topography. The highlands are rugged and forest-covered. Travel is slow and communication difficult. Most people living in the highlands are surrounded by neighbors belonging to different unrelated groups. If we look at an ethnolinguistic map of mainland Southeast Asia we would see the highlands represented by an incredible mosaic of peoples. In contrast, the lowlands are ethnically and linguistically homogeneous regions where easy communication and thus political and economic integration has long been possible.

The peoples living in the hills base their livelihood on a jungle gardening strategy called swidden, or shifting agriculture, that is exquisitely adapted to the peculiar qualities of Southeast Asian soils and rains. The topsoil in these forests is thin and fragile. It contains a proliferation of small organisms that rapidly recycle the debris that falls to the forest floor back into nutrients for the forest plants. The forest canopies protect the soil from being dried and hardened in the tropical sun or from being pulverized by the monsoon rains. If the forest should be cleared, a long process of succession of plants

eventually will rebuild the forest to its climax state. If a forest is cleared repeatedly, before succession has advanced far enough, the rains can leach important minerals from the soil. What then remains is a brick-like material called laterite that can support only hardy useless grass.

Highlanders seem well aware of the fragility of their forests. They clear a patch of hillside by slashing the forest cover and then they carefully burn the patch to obtain the ash fertilizer. After the burn and just before the onset of monsoon rains, these farmers plant a great diversity of crops on the clearing using only a dibble stick. This multicrop gardening is used to assure that the ground is shaded and covered to minimize the erosion. The crops obtained on these plots range from fruit to sugar cane and grains to ground-covering legumes and vegetables to starchy tubers underground. The swidden harvests provide the farmer's entire subsistence.

Planting in the same clearing a second year usually produces somewhat reduced yields. Further use of the patch might exhaust the soil, so the farmer shifts to another hillside and starts another clearing. After a fallow of about 20 years, a mountaineer might return to a slope he once farmed. By then the clearing will have become almost indistinguishable from the surrounding forest so the farmer can safely slash it and burn it once again and begin another cycle with no overall damage to the forest environment.

The endless movement of fairly small farming units that is essential to livelihood in these highland forests give rise to the scattering of peoples that we see represented on an ethnolinguistic map.

HIGHLAND SOCIETIES

This highland life-style is also characterized by certain important social and cultural features. Highlander societies are often organized on the basis of kinship. All the men who descend from a common ancestor may recognize that they belong to the same clan. Members of these clans may not all live in one place but may be scattered throughout the area where the group is found. Several of these clans might be represented in any one village.

Typically, the men of a clan feel they must find wives in clans other than their own, usually from villages far away. A substantial bride price is frequently required by which the groom's family asserts its wealth and standing and assures the bride's family that she will be valued and treated well. She severs her ties to her clan of birth and joins the clan of her husband.

In these societies, the girls who are born into a clan must leave it for another clan when

they marry. The women who marry into a clan will, therefore, all be strangers from different places. However, they are united by the fact that they are all proper marriage partners for the men of the clan. By extension, all the clans of origin of these women are allied to the clan into which the women marry. Consequently, the range of scattered clan communities within which women may move as brides creates an ethnic unity larger than the isolated farming village.

But this unity, which exists against a background of geographical fragmentation, is represented in one of the chief occupations of the women of these highland groups, which is making and decorating their clothes. The basic color and style of the decoration of the costume of the women frequently gives rise to the name of their ethnic group (e.g., Blue Hmong, White Hmong, Arm-Band Hmong) and serves as a symbol of the group's identity.

One could guess that these women would feel some tension in America since the very markers of their ethnic and personal identity make them vulnerable to instant identification as refugees. On the other hand, they are traditionally adept at forming a community with strangers, so it is not surprising to find that some have adjusted more quickly than the men to their new circumstances in the United States.

If the women and their marriages establish horizontal linkages among scattered mountain communities, the men and their activities often serve to establish vertical distinctions of status within a community. Men preside over religious feasts, which typically feature the sacrifice of an animal and the sharing of its meat among the guests, along with the consumption of large quantities of sacramental beer or liquor. The feasts become occasions for celebrating a man's wealth and thus his prowess and good fortune and increased prestige. A funeral, for instance, calls for a ceremonial feast to send the deceased to the realm of the revered and powerful ancestor spirits. The bereaved feast-giver may wish to stage a splendid feast so that he will be recognized as the rightful heir both to the esteem formerly due to the deceased and to eldership in the ancestor cult.

The pressures to stage expensive feasts at unexpected funerals and other life crises require a highland householder to spend his own wealth and goods and to enter an intricate web of debt to his kinsmen so that he can promote his prestige in the community by his generosity. But the ability of any individual to mobilize the surplus of his kin to his advantage is highly sensitive to the currents of public opinion and the state of community well-being.

These highland societies make it possible to recognize a man's individual merits, but this recognition is counterpoised by the abiding dependence of every successful man on

the prosperity and favorable disposition of his constituency of kinsmen and creditors. Every feast these highlanders give and every toast they drink gives the community a new opportunity to re-establish contact with the spirit world through the sacrifice and to reassess the status and authority of everyone in the social world.

One can imagine the effect on the self-esteem of men from such a culture if their circumstances in America make it impossible for them to re-enter this complex network of feasts and debts on the occasion, for example, of a relative's funeral. Such men literally might die of shame.

Southeast Asian hill tribes people are generally subsistence farmers. They are economically self-sufficient, and so trade usually is conducted for prestige purposes, to obtain precious metal for bride price payments and ceramic jars for alcohol gifts and debts. Some of these highlanders, notably the Hmong and the Mien, also have become aware of the opportunities for profit in growing cash crops in their forest clearings.

The Hmong and the Mien are among the most recent migrants into Southeast Asia from homelands in South China. Moving southward into the mountains of Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam during the last 100 years, they were obliged to find unoccupied forests at the very highest elevations. They found that opium poppies flourished on these mountaintops. Selling opium for export enabled them to buy silver necklaces for the women and pay for feasting. It was these two tribes of aggressive newcomers in Southeast Asia that became so useful to American operatives in Laos during the Vietnam War. They understood payment in cash and they served as brilliant jungle pathfinders and guerrilla fighters.

Traditionally, the scale of these Southeast Asian highland societies was small, and a low density of population was matched by highly decentralized patterns of authority. Advantage accrued to the healthy pioneer and adventurer who could seek out an industrious and clever bride, sire a large family and find suitable unoccupied forest for his future swiddens. These highlanders exemplify the virtues of rugged individualists. The values they hold highest are their autonomy and freedom of movement. Now many thousands of these highland forest farmers face the challenge of suiting their pioneer values and skills to the conditions they find as new immigrants to the United States.

FARMERS OF THE PLAINS

The people living in the lowland plains and in some upland valleys and plateaus of Southeast Asia have taken advantage of their smooth landscape to establish domains inhabited by broadly homogeneous populations. The ease of movement by bullock cart or river raft and the sharing of one language with everyone else in the valley has al-

lowed lowland peoples to mobilize their efforts on a much larger scale than is possible in the rugged hill country. At the same time, the mountains that separate the river plains from one another also have enabled each of the lowland groups to evolve its own unique social institutions in relative isolation and security from its neighbors.

The fundamental large-scale group activity in which Southeast Asian lowlanders participate is wet-rice agriculture. This agricultural strategy rests on generations of society-wide reshaping of the landscape to create irrigation systems. Fully developed wet-rice farming requires an elaborate network of dams, reservoirs, canals, sluices, ditches and dikes and innumerable flat terraces in which the water level can be controlled and rice can be grown. All of this demands enormous earthmoving effort and continual refinement and maintenance. On account of the generations of accumulated investment needed to establish these wet-rice systems, farmers usually find it easier to expand existing systems rather than pioneer new areas. Once in place, these wet-rice complexes can endure indefinitely with prudent management.

The rice plants on these lowland terraces obtain much of their nutrients from the water rather than from the soil. A nutrient brew is created by the symbiosis of a water fern, a bluegreen algae and bacteria in the warm, gently moving waters of the rice field. The water rests on a bed of mud that the farmer has laboriously churned and smoothed and leveled, using a water buffalo-drawn plow and harrow. The water is periodically drained during the growing season to eliminate weeds and to aerate the field. By careful agriculture practices such as pregerminating the seed, transplanting seedlings from a nursery to the field, judicious spacing, weeding and harvesting of the plants and by close attention to water control, the farmer may get two excellent yields of rice a year. That higher productivity of grain has made possible much higher population densities on the plains than is possible in the hills.

EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

In contrast to the shifting, self-sufficient highland farmers, wet-rice cultivators are sedentary specialists in a single crop. Lowlanders live in permanent villages surrounded by vast, shimmering green carpets of wet-rice. They must get nearly everything else they need at the local market. The surplus grain these farmers sell to obtain their vegetables and fish and other goods depends entirely on the size and location of their rice field. Advantage in this regard goes to the descendants of village founders, who have inherited the best property and have traditional priority in the distribution of water.

Inequities in control over the means to produce food and acquire wealth give rise to opportunities for some privileged members of the rice-growing community to hire the manpower of others in exchange for a part of the harvest. Traditional gift exchanges, a

balanced circulation of debts and redistribution of wealth by feasts in a small-scale society begin to grade into the relations between peasantry and an elite society expands. These relations are marked more by perennial dependence of clients on a patron than by expectations of tribute and obligatory labor and eventually by taxes and armed service. Face-to-face interaction among more or less equal farmers grades imperceptibly into personal relations between agrarian commoners and a specialist centralized bureaucracy as village society is transformed into a stratified state.

In the lowland societies of Southeast Asia, the highly refined systems of hierarchy and patterns of deference are built into the very language people speak. These languages cannot be spoken without some acknowledgement of the relative social level of the speakers. Awareness of gradations in social standing is as fundamental for these lowland Southeast Asian speakers, as a consideration of past, present and future tense is for speaking European languages.

Teachers of Southeast Asian children should understand that the shyness and reticence they often observe in these students are likely to be the result of their intense desire to be polite. In Southeast Asian lowland societies, breaches of etiquette can be dangerous. It is believed that if powerful patrons, elders or superiors feel slighted or offended, they can be implacably vindictive.

Easy communications, homogeneous populations, a readiness to work in concert with others for common benefit, the production of a surplus, the importance of ownership and inheritance of property and an acceptance of difference in rank and privilege—all these factors made possible the emergence of states in the wet-rice-growing lowlands of Southeast Asia, the subject to which we now turn.

LAOS, "LAND OF A MILLION ELEPHANTS"

The traditional epithet for Laos brings to mind the fact that this is a country of rugged mountain terrain and deep forests where elephants abound. The extremely hilly topography helps explain why, in comparison with the Vietnamese and the Cambodians, the Lao have had the least success in their attempts at political integration.

The Lao are a branch of the Tai (or Thai) people who filtered down into Southeast Asia from a homeland in South China. The Tai are probably very distant cousins of the Hmong and the Mien. The Mongol conquests of South China in the 13th century gave increased impetus to these southward Tai migrations, and from around that time small Tai principalities begin to develop in eastern Burma (the Shan), along the Chao Praya River in what is now Thailand (the Siamese), and along the middle reach of the Mekong River in what is now Laos (the Lao).

These Tai people had a preference for wet-rice agriculture and generally tried to settle in the flatlands rather than on steep hill land. In the middle reach of the Mekong, however, the Lao found that the land adaptable to wet-rice cultivation was scarce and fragmented in the valleys of small tributaries. Topography limited the Lao to establishing simple irrigation systems. Their fields were watered by rainfall and trenches were dug for drainage. Lao farmers regularly utilized swidden techniques on nearby forested slopes and where possible leveled the land and built dikes to convert the slope to wet-rice terraces.

The inherent limitations on the growth of large political units in Laos, in comparison with its neighbors in the former colony of Indochina, is suggested by population-density figures. In the delta of the Red River around Hanoi, and in the Mekong Delta, population density reaches 3,500 people per square mile. By contrast, in the most populous valley regions of Laos the population density averages less than 100 people per square mile; the mountainous regions of Laos, where hillfolk like the Hmong and Mien live, support as few as two people per square mile.

The Lao of Laos represent less than half of the population of their country. The majority of "Laotians" are the scattered hill tribes people. Indeed, more Lao by far live on the right bank of the Mekong, in northeast Thailand, than live in Laos. The reason for this is that the French created the country of Laos in the 19th century. They defined their possession as the eastern half or left bank of the Mekong River Basin, in their contention with the British over spheres of colonial interest in this part of Southeast Asia. The European imperial powers frequently ignored native conceptions of ethnic and political unity as they pursued their colonial agenda.

Before the French colonial era, the Lao had formed five main principalities and a host of smaller chieftainships. The major Lao princes all traced their descent to a quasi-legendary king of the 14th century named Fa-Ngoum. He is credited with having brought the skills of statecraft and a knowledge of Theravada Buddhist religion and scholarship from Cambodia to unify a kingdom called Lan Xang (Land of a Million Elephants). The kingdom flourished only briefly before being dismembered by its neighbors, the Burmese, the Tai and the Vietnamese.

When the French arrived, they utilized the vestiges of the Lao principalities on their side of the Mekong in the conduct of their own administration. The Lao political elite, comprising a few hundred people from fewer than 20 prominent families, served in most subordinate positions in provincial bureaucracies. The middle-level positions in the colony were manned by French-trained Vietnamese. Before World War II, the three largest cities in Laos had majority populations of Vietnamese civil servants and merchants. The use of Vietnamese in these colonial positions in Laos (and Cambodia)

probably helps account for the abiding hostility of the native elites of these countries to the Vietnamese. A very small number of Frenchmen, using time-honored techniques of divide and rule, held all substantial power until the Japanese troops entered.

After World War II, there was no blossoming of a national independence movement in Laos as there was in the other liberated colonies. Instead, members of rival elite Laotian families resumed their traditional struggle for dominance under the new labels of "rightist," "neutralist" and "leftist."

In contrast to the Lao, the Vietnamese and the Khmer (Cambodians) have ancient histories of ethnic and political integration in their respective realms. To these people and their eventual confrontation I will now turn.

VIETNAM, A LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA

The Vietnamese are among the most dynamic people of the Third World. They have been willing to fight tenaciously for a vision of social and political order, marshalling astonishing social and material resources. Many of these Vietnamese (and Chinese of long domicile in Vietnam) now live in the United States where they frequently give the impression of being people with great drive for success in their new country. The Vietnamese are expected to soon constitute the second or third largest Asian-American group in the United States.

The Vietnamese are also numerous in Southeast Asia. Vietnam has about 10 times the population of its neighbor, Cambodia, and has roughly the same size population as Thailand. With one of the largest standing armies in the world and with the clear intention of safeguarding their security in Asia aggressively, the Vietnamese remain a force to be reckoned with in this strategic region.

The written history of Vietnam began with the establishment of Chinese rule. In the 2nd century B.C., China's expansionist Han Empire moved southward to consolidate the region beyond the Yangtse River, which was then the home of many non-Chinese tribes. One of these tribes, the Yue (pronounced Viet in Vietnamese) was centered in the Red River Delta where the Dong Son Bronze culture had flourished. In 111 B.C., the Han emperor completed the conquest of the Yue and organized them into the southernmost province of China. Vietnam remained a Chinese colony for the next 1,000 years.

Accounts in Chinese annals and chronicles make it clear that the Vietnamese clung fast to their ethnic identity and continued to practice their non-Chinese traditions of chewing betel nut, blackening their teeth, tattooing their bodies and hunting with arrows dipped in a secret poison. Those traditions reveal an ancient cultural affinity between

the Yue tribes and other peoples and cultures of mainland and also insular Southeast Asia. The Chinese chronicles also report that the unruly Vietnamese did not easily submit to Han rule and rebelled at every opportunity.

Many of the non-Han tribal peoples (including some northern Yue) of southern China eventually were thoroughly assimilated under Chinese occupation. The Yue of the Red River Delta, however, tenaciously preserved their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. The Chinese attempted to dominate the region by settling Chinese colonists there and by forcing the native population to abandon some of their customs and adopt Chinese customs, rites and certain articles of clothing such as shoes and hats. The Vietnamese replied with constant uprisings and resistance and largely succeeded in maintaining their distinctive ethnic identity by preserving their own habits, usages, folklore and — most important, their own language.

CHINESE TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS

The Chinese introduced some technological innovations that had significant impact on Vietnam. The iron plow and draught animals made possible increased rice production, which led to a growing population. The Chinese also introduced important refinements in water control. The Red River is a short, violent river fed by the rain of both annual monsoons. The Chinese, drawing on their long experience in water management, promoted the construction of massive dikes and dams and a system of canals to prevent the river from flooding and to utilize the water in irrigation by means of large wheels. Over a period of two millenia, 4.5 billion cubic feet of earth were moved, basketful by basketful, to create massive dikes that now stretch for more than 1,600 miles. These dikes, essential to food production, were among the principal targets of United States bombing of North Vietnam.

The Chinese instituted new methods of manpower mobilization to maintain and administer these public works and irrigation schemes. The Chinese also introduced their notions about land ownership and the proper relations between the ruling owner of the land and his subject tenants. During this period, a small elite of Vietnamese clan chiefs became landlords in the Han manner, accepted Chinese education and were employed in the Imperial Civil Service to rule on behalf of their Chinese overlords.

While Chinese social and political ideals during this period had little direct impact on villagers, the Vietnamese peasants did enthusiastically accept the Chinese version of Mahayana Buddhism, with its pantheon of merciful Bodhisattavas who intercede on behalf of devotees in response to faithful prayer. The intuitive Thien sect (in Japanese known as Zen) of Mahayana Buddhism became particularly popular among the Vietnamese as the antithesis of a more bureaucratized religion practiced by the elite. Bud-

dhism and some aspects of Taoism and Confucianism, as well as pre-Chinese beliefs in the ancestors and in spirits, became mixed during this period into a unique national religion of the Vietnamese.

VIETNAMESE INDEPENDENCE

In 939 A.D., during a period of turmoil in China, the Vietnamese successfully overthrew Chinese control and established their independence. As frequently happens in former colonies, the a liberated people begin to view their former masters with increased admiration. During 1,000 years of their government, the Chinese had not succeeded in their attempts to assimilate the Vietnamese. However, after a couple of hundred years of independence, Chinese institutions were firmly established in Vietnam by its own kings.

The rulers of Vietnam adopted Confucian political philosophy to organize their newly independent state. Chinese language, literature and social graces became the principal subjects of an educational system that would produce gentlemen-scholars, the mandarin administrators, by a rigorous system of examinations. While entry into the ruling class of mandarins was theoretically open to all "respectable citizens" by public examinations, in practice only wealthy landowners could afford the costs of educating their sons to pass the exams.

The mandarins served as bureaucrats in a vast hierarchical framework presided over by the Vietnamese ruler. On the Chinese model, the king was considered to be the son of heaven and father of the realms, the supreme landlord, the individual most in tune with Order and the natural principles of the cosmos (the Tao). His officials, like ranked sons in a family, governed the populace by utilizing the intricate rules of obedience and loyalty.

At the base of society, counterpoised to the Chinese-inspired Confucian elite, were the Vietnamese villages. These small, close-knit communities usually surrounded by a palisade of living bamboo, embodied the Vietnamese ideals of village autonomy and self-sufficiency. The villagers were in part a religious congregation centered on a cult of the god of the soil and in part a kinship group organized around patrilineal clans. Land holdings were generally small and no great socio-economic differences existed in the community. The village elders managed communal land for social welfare purposes and supervised maintenance of the local irrigation network. The village mayor was the intermediary between his village and the central government. These mayors generally sought every means to minimize the impact upon their constituents of governmental demands for taxes, labor and military service.

PUSH TO THE SOUTH

After gaining independence from China, the Vietnamese of the Red River Delta area increased social and political consolidation over a rapidly growing population. The Vietnamese king was proclaimed emperor over lands further south by his own suzerain, the Emperor of China. In the 11th century, the Vietnamese began their inexorable *nam tein* (push to the south) at the expense of people living along the narrow coast of central Vietnam.

The southern neighbors of the Vietnamese at this time were the Cham, a fierce, seagoing people related to the Indonesian peoples of the archipelago who early had adopted Hindu and Buddhist national symbols from India for their small state that stretched south into the Mekong Delta. By the 15th century, the Vietnamese had completely laid waste this Indianized state, driving the surviving Chams over the mountains to Cambodia or into small enclaves in southern Vietnam. The guilt that the Vietnamese feel about these events in the history of their march to the south is evident in a popular superstition among the Vietnamese today, that the suffering their country had endured at the hands of the French and the Americans was in retribution for their wars of extermination against the Cham.

With the Cham state eliminated, the way was open for land-hungry Vietnamese to push into the rich Mekong Delta, which was part of Cambodia. In 1623, the Vietnamese obtained control of a customs house called Prei Nokor, which was then on the Cambodian border. This site later became known as Saigon and, as we know, eventually was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

Vietnamese colonists were quick to seize the vast opportunities in the sparsely populated Mekong Delta area. Fortified Vietnamese villages were given to demobilized veterans and much encouragement was given to opening and developing the delta for rice cultivation. The government also encouraged the immigration of Chinese refugees fleeing the fall of the Ming dynasty and the ascendancy of the Manchu. These Chinese were settled in Saigon's sister city, Cholon.

CONTACT WITH EUROPEANS AND POLARIZATION OF NORTH AND SOUTH

The 16th and 17th centuries saw the development of a polarization of North and South in Vietnam. The traditional heartland, the Red River Delta, was the intellectual and cultural center ruled by Confucian mandarins and was the site of the imperial capital of the Trinh dynasty. The Trinh were preoccupied with internal security for they had to deal with semi-autonomous warlords operating in the Vietnam-China border area and

with powerful Mandarin families within the realm that might rival the emperor. The Trinh attempted to revive a Vietnamese national culture by suppressing thepredominant Chinese influence among the elite.They began, for example, to print dynastic histories and chronicles in Vietnamese instead of Chinese, although they continued to utilize the Chinese script. The northerners were generally hostile to the Europeans who appeared on their shores at this time. The Jesuits who were expelled from Japan in the 17th century initially went to the Portuguese colony at Macao and then turned their missionary efforts toward Vietnam. The Confucian elite of the Trinh in Hanoi gave these Europeans a hostile reception. The Jesuits found a more congenial welcome further south.

Geographical distance and poor communications with the northern center of government permitted a rival dynasty to emerge in the south, and the Nguyen established their own kinship in Hue. The Nguyen obtained arms from the Portuguese to pursue their southward expansion into the Mekong Delta, and they also welcomed the Catholic missionaries. In the 1660s, one of these Jesuits, Alexander of Rhodes, developed a Roman script with diacritics to indicate the tones of Vietnamese in order to write a catechism in Vietnamese. Soon this Roman script, still in use today, became a symbol by which the growing Westernized elite could express its opposition to the domination of the traditional upper-class mandarins whose authority was based on their command of literacy in the Chinese script.

The slow dismemberment of Cambodian peripheral holdings in the Mekong Delta, which opened up new lands to the pioneer spirit of the Vietnamese colonists, reinforced the differences between North and South. In contrast to the conservative North, the South became the land of adventure, speculation, business opportunity and new wealth. In contrast to the traditions of the North, the South saw the appearance of large land holdings, villages with large populations and marked differences in wealth, and recruitment to government by practical examinations based on the current military, economic and social situation.

In the late 18th century, about the time of American's Revolutionary War, a popular uprising known as the Tay Son rebellion attempted to overturn both of the ruling families that divided the North from the South in order to reunite the country. One of the southern princes, Nguyen Anh, escaped the terror with the help of a French missionary and was taken to Europe where his infant son became a darling of the court of the ill-fated Louis XVI. With the aid of the French, Nguyen Anh returned to Hue where, in 1802, he had himself declared emperor with a new name, Gia Long. He continued his military successes and soon brought the entire country under his control, giving it the name "Vietnam."

THE FRENCH COLONY

Successors to Gia Long in the 19th century were hostile to the growing influence of Europeans and their Christian converts in Vietnam. Incidents of violence against the church were used to justify France's invasion of the Mekong Delta and seizure of Saigon in 1862. The French called this southernmost portion of Vietnam Cochin China, and ruled it directly as part of France. It had a representative to the legislature in Paris, a French governor and French-manned civil service. Only the most subordinate positions in the government of Cochin China were given to Vietnamese.

Annam, central Vietnam, came under French control a little later, in 1884. The emperor at Hue was maintained as a figurehead along with his mandarins, but every ministry had a Frenchman as overseer. In Tonkin, the Red River region farthest north, a protectorate was established in 1884 in which a Frenchman had executive powers but the mandarins were maintained to serve their traditional administrative functions. Meanwhile, Cambodia had become a protectorate in 1863; it was ruled by French officials with administration staffed by Vietnamese. In 1893, the principalities of Laos were merged into this French colony, which finally became known as the "Union of Indochina."

Under the banner of their "civilizing mission" in the East, the French proceeded to make the colony a profit-making enterprise. Indochina became a classic colonial dependency producing raw materials–rice, rubber, metal ores, coal–for export and importing manufactured goods from France. Peasants who had been self-sufficient farmers now were forced to become producers of surplus in a money economy organized for the profit of the foreign colonies' regime.

In both the North (Tonkin) and the South (Cochin China) the chief colonial investment was in commercial agriculture. In the North, the French obtained large tracts of rice land by confiscating them from officials who resisted the new colonial masters. The North also provided investment opportunities in mining and in manufacturing because of the abundance of cheap labor to exploit. Port facilities, railroads and paved roads were built to serve the trading interests of the French and Chinese entrepreneurs who sent Vietnamese products into the international market.

In the South, conditions for investment were somewhat different. Advanced French technological skills were focused on reclaiming Mekong Delta lands, draining and desalinating its swamps. Soon huge tracts of new land were made available to French capitalists and to a few wealthy Vietnamese and Chinese. These investors became absentee landlords of rice farms worked and improved by tenants or renters. Wealthy French and local planters also converted reclaimed acreage into vast rubber estates. The

labor needed on these new estates was imported from the overpopulated North and the workers lived in conditions of virtual serfdom. Landless tenant farmers, impoverished estate workers, immiserated urban factory workers subject to systematic exploitation by their colonial masters soon became a disaffected populace eager for the relief promised by an overthrow of French domination and by the institution of communist reforms.

THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

In World War II, the pro-Vichy colonial administration in Indochina accepted Japanese occupation. The Japanese, in turn, recognized French sovereignty and left administration of Indochina in French hands. Indochinese resources were accordingly made available to the Japanese war effort. In 1945, the puppet Emperor Bao Dai was prompted by the Japanese to declare the independence of united Vietnam. When Japan surrendered, the Vietnamese Independence League (Viet Minh) led by Ho Chi Minh took Hanoi, and shortly afterward Bao Dai abdicated in favor of independence from colonial domination on September 2, 1945.

The Potsdam Peace Conference of 1945 stipulated that the Chinese were to reoccupy Vietnam north of the 16th Parallel, and that the English were to occupy the portion of the country south of the parallel. The English military permitted the French who had been prisoners of war of the Japanese to rearm and retake Saigon. French troops soon arrived to replace the English. In the North, Ho Chi Minh's forces attempted to resist the return of the French and the re-establishment of a colonial regime.

As is well known, the Vietnamese strategy which then emerged was to conduct guerrilla war against the Europeans, "nationwide, total and long term," in the words of General Giap, depending on popular support in the villages for food, shelter, intelligence, transport and hiding places. The French clung to the methods of classic warfare—fortified positions, extensive supply lines and control of the cities. By 1953, the United States was paying for 80% of the French military effort to regain the colony of Indochina. In 1954, in the aftermath of Giap's devastating conquest of the French position at Dien Bien Phu, a peace conference was convened in Geneva calling for the reunification of the nation. In Saigon, however, the Catholic, anti-communist dictator Ngo Dinh Diem, supported by a wealthy, Westernized South Vietnamese elite and by the United States of America, rejected the Geneva accords, and the long civil war with Ho Chi Minh's forces began.

CAMBODIA, EMPIRE OF THE GOD-KINGS

Most Vietnamese immigrants to the United States come from urban (and therefore Westernized) backgrounds and thus have somewhat of an advantage over many other

refugees. Most of the Cambodians who fled the atrocities in their country and resettled in America are from rural backgrounds. Not only are they victims of gruesome war experiences, they are also essentially uprooted farmers from rice-growing villages who now face staggering difficulties in adapting to the conditions in American towns and cities. Nevertheless, Cambodians possess the heritage of a glorious and ancient history, a refined artistic tradition, a deeply religious sense of community and a highly evolved political culture. These cultural resources may be of use to them here in strengthening their resilience as they cope with the traumas and challenges of their refugee and immigrant circumstances.

THE ANCIENT ENTREPOT OF FUNAN AND EAST-WEST TRADE

References in the Chinese sources, a few local inscriptions in Sanskrit—and especially the archaeological record—eloquently attest to the emergence of a trading empire based in the southern portion of the Mekong Delta during the first centuries of the Christian era. The name of this early state is given by the Chinese records as Funan, which is recognizable as the Cambodian word *phnom*, meaning "mountain." The word is preserved to this day in the name of Cambodia's capital. The Chinese describe the people of Funan as ugly, black, curly-haired and naked (that is, not Chinese-looking). The Funanese were said to build their houses up on stilts, in contrast to the Vietnamese and Chinese who build on the ground, and to have marriage and funeral customs that generally resemble the institutions of the Chams. The picture of the ancient Funanese that emerges from these earliest Chinese references leads to the conclusion that they were basically the same stock as the present-day lowland Cambodians.

The Chinese records remark that the Funanese were fond of engraving and that they adored divinities represented by bronze images with two faces and four arms or four faces and eight arms. The archaeological record certainly reveals the great skill of the Funanese craftsmen in producing intaglio gems and incised merchants' seals in gold and silver as well as engraved tin amulets and glass beads. The reference to divinities with multiple arms suggests the representation of Hindu gods, and this is further supported by Chinese mention of books and archives in Funan written in an Indic script. (Such texts would have been written on perishable materials and, if not recopied, would soon have been lost.)

The Chinese records also mention perogatives of the Funanese king to ride about on an elephant dressed in brocade and to dwell in a multi–storied palace. This king is said to have constructed large ships that sailed the ocean for conquest and trade. His subjects paid taxes in gold, silver, perfume and pearls. This last remark probably means that the king took part in an international commercial economy based on the collection of prized spices and aromatic resins from the highland forests and the products gathered from the strand and the sea.

Recent archaeological work in the southernmost area of the delta, in what is now Vietnam, has revealed astonishing evidence of early manpower mobilization and state formation in the pre-Angkor era. There are traces of a great canal 125 miles long stretching from the coast to an inland capital probably dating from the 2nd century A.D. This canal would have permitted tea–trading ships to enter the Funan capital, but could have been defended easily in case of pirate raids into the agrarian heartland. The canal was also part of a vast network of early swamp reclamation and irrigation, suggesting an advanced wet-rice agriculture.

The finds in Funan include 2nd to 4th century Roman goods–coins, glassware, lamps–and 1st to 3rd century Chinese bronze goods. These remains, as well as Funanese-style ceramics and sculpture, all along the coast of the Gulf of Thailand, suggest that this was the first Southeast Asian state to exert control over the trading routes between East and West that passed across the region.

Funan was ideally located on the sea route between the growing empires in the Mediterranean and in China. Both these empires had an insatiable demand for exotic luxuries: glass and amber from Europe was exchanged for silks from China, and both desired tropical products from Southeast Asia. The achievement of the Funanese was to establish an emporium to facilitate this trade. This involved making available in one convenient marketplace a variety of goods from their own forests and coasts and from neighboring vassal regions. The emporium the Funanese developed must have been able to provide an anchorage safe from monsoon storms and pirates and a situation where ships could be repaired and reprovisioned with food and fresh water.

To establish a successful emporium the Funanese also must have reached a level of economic order and political stability to serve the interests of international traders. Foreigners would need amenities for prolonged visits and their goods would need protection. Products would have to be processed, graded and marked reliably and stored safely. Banking and credit facilities, assay and exchange specialists, a system of weights and measures and an availability of casual labor for hauling and loading goods would all have to have been in place to permit the kind of commerce that the archaeological record of Funan reveals.

INDIANIZATION

By the 5th century we begin to find Sanskrit inscriptions in Funan and clear evidence of the use of an Indian dating system and official patronage of Indian cults of both Hindu gods and Mahayana Buddhist divinities. By the middle of the 6th century the Chinese themselves send to Funan for authentic versions of the Buddhist scripture. We learn that the king of Funan responded by sending the emperor a member of his entourage, an Indian brahmin, with 240 bundles of texts.

The question that is raised by these developments is how did the Indianization of Funan (and of the other states that emerged in Southeast Asian except for Vietnam) take place? In answer, it is useful to contrast the process of Sinicization that occurred in Vietnam. The Chinese were accustomed to spreading their civilization by military conquest, annexation and assimilation. Mandarin officials who governed a Chinese province like Vietnam attempted to force the adoption of Chinese language, customs and institutions and, in the case of Vietnam, had to deal with a permanent resistance to Chinese cultural and political domination.

In the case of Funan and her successor states in Cambodia, and in the other Indianized states of Southeast Asia (i.e., Champa and various kingdoms in Burma, Thailand and Indonesia), the situation seems quite different. There is no evidence of aggressive expansion by Indian conquerors in these early centuries. The penetration of Indian cultural themes in Southeast Asia seems to have been prolonged, peaceful and highly variable from place to place and time to time. Local indigenous beliefs and institutions were generally reshaped and renamed and elaborated with features of Indian inspiration without the ambivalence and cultural conflict that is the leitmotif of the Chinese-Vietnamese relationship. This evidence suggests that Southeast Asian states came into contact with India on nearly equal footing.

The initiative for adopting cultural innovations from India may have been on the side of Southeast Asian state builders. These emerging chiefs of trading centers like Funan undoubtedly appreciated the techniques of social control and statecraft that had been developing in India for millenia. These Southeast Asians probably saw the political advantages of dignifying their authority with the mystifications available in Indian religion, which were compatible with traditional Southeast Asian beliefs. They also probably saw the practical advantages of importing expatriate advisors to their courts to serve as priests, magicians, scribes, town planners, translators for visiting merchants and envoys to other heads of state.

The Indian influence in early Southeast Asian history under these conditions fits well with what we know of Southeast Asian societies today. Indian-inspired values generally seem most prominent in the traditional elite groups of court and capital and gradually diminish as we look farther out to village peasantry; these influences practically vanish as we view peripheral tribal peoples. Nevertheless, in these Indianized states, the elite, the peasantry and kindred tribal peoples all recognize that there is a strong indigenous substratum of spirit belief that they share and that makes mutual tolerance possible. This situation stands in contrast to the exclusivity that marks Chinese-inspired cultural values in early Southeast Asia. The Chinese view, adopted to an extent in Vietnam, makes a rigid distinction between what is Chinese and civilized and everything else, which is barbarian and contemptible. To the extent that such views still exist,

they might help explain the difficulties unassimilated overseas Chinese and Southeast Asians often have in getting along with one another.

THE MAGNIFICENT ANGKOR WAT

The states that succeeded Funan in Cambodia, Chenla (6th to 8th centuries) and Angkor (9th to 15th centuries), come into much better historical focus for us because they left abundant inscriptions and world-renowned monuments and waterworks. These states were further inland than Funan and were agrarian rather than oriented to maritime trade. The unique challenge for these Cambodians was the nature of the Mekong River where they lived just above the delta. In contrast to the short, turbulent Red River whose monsoon floods the Vietnamese learned to manage with their dikes, the Mekong is extremely long, originating in the Himalayas with a spate fed by spring thaws. The alluvium that builds up each year in the delta dams the river and makes possible the annual Cambodian miracle. On a day marked by ancient ritual, a tributary of the Mekong changes its direction of flow and the waters of the Mekong surge upstream, forming a huge lake called Tonle Sap in the middle of Cambodia. This lake becomes an extraordinarily rich fishing ground.

The problem the Cambodian kings faced was to build their cities at the high-water mark of the lake and to keep water nearby all year to supply irrigation for wet-rice agriculture even when the lake receded and the region returned to its otherwise relatively arid condition. Their solution was to create huge reservoirs connected by a network of canals, at the center of which were the great temples. These reservoirs were not excavated, rather they were areas surrounded by dikes that impounded the rising lake waters above their plain for later distribution by gravity flow through the canals to the surrounding rice fields.

Understandably, the predominant theme in the art, architecture and religion of Angkor was the representation of the king as the source of fertility, the master of the waters and the ultimate guarantor of prosperity in his realm. The center of the Cambodian state was a replica of the cosmic mountain from which the fructifying rivers flowed into the world. From the summit of this temple-mountain, the king, like a god, saw to the welfare of his people. By a sacred investiture, the king was identified with the image of a Hindu divinity, Siva or Visnu, or with an image of one of the compassionate Bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism. This god-king arrayed his ministers and advisors about him in multiples of four, imitating Indian political theory and in accord with the design of the monumental shrine or capital. Radiating from the temple were the rice fields, which produced two and three crops a year and supported a large population for whom labor on public works and military service to expand the Cambodian Empire was a form of worship.

DECLINE AND FALL

At the peak of its grandeur, during the reign of Jayavarman VII (1181-1218), the Cambodian Empire reached north into Laos, west all the way to Burma, south into Malaya and east to Champa. Soon, however, new forces began to press Cambodia from either side. During the 13th and 14th centuries, new arrivals in Southeast Asia, the Tai, were moving southward from their tribal homeland in south China. They established themselves in the valley of the Chao Praya River at the expense of the Mons, a people related to the Cambodians. These expanding Tai inevitably began to encroach upon the western borders of Cambodia's realm, upsetting the intricate system of irrigation works. By the 15th century, the Tai were firmly settled in the middle reach of the Chao Praya and were able to sack Angkor and carry off a large part of its population. The Cambodian kings shifted their capital eastward to the lower end of the lake and in 1434 founded Phnom Penh, which has remained the capital to this day.

Possibly due to popular discontent over forced labor on temple building and military service and because the erosion of the authority of the kings who were defeated by the Tai, the Cambodians in this period began to adopt Theravada Buddhism from the Tai, who had recently learned this religion from the Mons whom they had engulfed. Thervada Buddhism, the religion of the Cambodians, Tai, Lao and Burmese to this day, preaches salvation through individual effort. It probably appealed to the masses because it rejects the call to support a god-king and his opulent aristocracy and priesthood who aimed to hold the populace in the thrall of the powers of awesome divinities.

As we have already seen, the other new arrivals on the scene at just this time were the Vietnamese who vanquished the Cham in 1471 and continued their push to the south to encroach on Cambodia from the east as they moved into the Mekong Delta.

SQUEEZED BETWEEN TWO NEIGHBORS

From the 15th to the 19th century, Cambodian rulers, with a relatively sparsely populated but rich country, sought to preserve their national integrity while being squeezed by the much larger and aggressive populations of Thailand and Vietnam. In 1846, the King of Cambodia, Ang Duong, was consecrated and invested with his sacred regalia in traditions that traced back over 1,000 years to Indian concepts of kingship. Ang Duong was, however, crowned in the name of the sovereigns of both Siam (Thailand) and Vietnam. In 1864, King Norodom, the great-grandfather of Norodom Sihanouk, was crowned by French officials whom the Cambodians thought might help protect their country against their Tai and Vietnamese neighbors.

Under French administration in Indochina, Cambodia was used as a buffer against the Tai expansion into Cochin China and received little development attention from the

colonial regime. The use of Vietnamese as the functionaries in Cambodia exacerbated the enmity of the Cambodians, who saw themselves being pushed out of the delta and ruled by their rivals.

At the end of World War II, King Sihanouk proclaimed Cambodia's independence and tried to harmonize his royal perogatives and his semi-sacred stature with the requirements of a modernizing state. After the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference, Sihanouk, having abdicated, attempted as head of state to steer a careful course of neutrality among the impossibly treacherous contrary forces presented by China, Russia, the United States, the North Vietnamese communist forces, the South Vietnamese communist forces and the South Vietnamese anti-communist forces. America's war effort in South Vietnam eventually spilled over into Cambodia in the aftermath, Sihanouk was deposed and replaced by General Lon Nol who was acceptable to the United States.

AFTERMATH OF THE WAR

The victory of communist forces in 1975 in both Vietnam and Cambodia ushered in well-known recent events. In Cambodia, the Pol Pot regime explicitly harked back to the achievements of the rulers of Angkor in their efforts to mobilize the peasant manpower of the nation to recreate vast irrigation projects and prosperous rice farms. The obstacles that had to be removed were percieved to be the ruling class living in luxury in the cities. The Pol Pot regime made it possible for the Vietnamese to justify invading Cambodia and occupying the country by the Vietnamese army, which continues today.

In 1961, Sihanouk responded to Western questions about the role he thought China might play in the future of Southeast Asia. "In this jungle which is the real world," Sihanouk observed, "should we, simple deer, interest ourselves in a dinosaur like China when we are more directly menaced and have been for centuries by the wolf and the tiger who are Vietnam and Thailand?" It remains to be seen whether the deer of Southeast Asia will survive or be devoured by their stronger neighbors.